

The Life and Professional Contributions of Elmer Dayton Mitchell To American Physical Education and Sport

By

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This study is a chronicle of the contributions of Elmer Dayton Mitchell to physical education and sport in the United States with special emphasis on the period 1912 to 1958.

The two Great World Wars I and II and their aftermaths fluctuating from unparalleled economic prosperity to the depths of economic depression brought great changes to life in the United States. Rapid and radical events occurred which tested the adaptability of the human organism. Physical education was an emerging discipline during these years which underwent similar transformations in thought and action. Among the most influential physical educators of the period was Elmer Dayton Mitchell.

Dr. Mitchell obtained his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Michigan in 1912. After spending three years at Grand Rapids as a secondary teacher and Athletic Director, he moved to Michigan State Normal College at Ypsilanti, receiving appointment there as Athletic Director and Assistant Professor of Physical Education. In 1917, he returned to the University of Michigan. Dr. Mitchell became that school's first basketball coach in 1917 along with assignments as assistant coach in football and freshman baseball coach. Two years later he earned the A.M. degree and became Director of Intramural Athletics. He was a member of the physical education faculty at Michigan, becoming a full professor in 1938 upon completion of the Ph.D. degree. From 1942 until retirement in 1958, Dr. Mitchell served as Chairman of the Department of Physical Education for Men. In addition he served as Chairman of Department "F" of the School of Education 1936-42, 1948-51 and 1954-57.

Perhaps Dr. Mitchell's most important contributions lie in three areas. First, as a pioneer in intramural athletics he led the way in popularizing a wide sports program which met the interests of most all students. The program at Michigan served as a model for many other institutions. Secondly, as Editor of *The Pentathlon*, the *Journal of Health and Physical Education*, and *The Research Quarterly*, for a crucial fifteen year period, Mitchell decided what topics were printed in these widely read periodicals and expressed his views in an editorial column in the *Journal*. His third major contribution was in the area of graduate education. At Michigan, Dr. Mitchell was instrumental in the development of the masters and doctoral programs in physical education. Other contributions include his invention of the game of speedball and his innovative Olympic study tours for university credit.

Mitchell's total view of physical education as an integral part of education and of society might well have earned him "the sociologist of physical education" title.